

Transforming Conflict and Humiliation to Heal Hearts in the Holy Land: People-to-People Projects to Build Peace, Coexistence and Cooperation between Palestinians and Israelis

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In the midst of humiliation, terror, trauma and war in the Middle East, brave civilian Palestinians and Israelis are working together in unique projects to bring mutual respect, dignity, understanding and peace to their lives, cooperation and co-existence. This paper presents a myriad of psychosocial programs that are being done by Israelis and Palestinians working together to bridge their cultural divide. This presentation addresses how cooperation is possible in such a seemingly intractable conflict, and gives vivid examples of the most current attempts to bridge cultural divides, through techniques like dialoguing, intergroup encounters, and unique, compelling and interesting programs and approaches to create collaboration and cooperation. Projects initiated by some of the brilliant people who have participated in this conference in past years are included. This psychosocial issues behind the conflict are explored from both perspectives in the new book, "Terror in the Holy Land: Inside the Anguish of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (Praeger Press, October, 2006) and projects to facilitate peace are presented in an upcoming book "Beyond Bullets and Bombs: Peacebuilding Projects between Palestinians and Israelis" (Praeger Press, due out April, 2007). These include innovative communication techniques including nonviolent communication and compassionate listening, a group for grieving parents, and projects based in education and the arts by or for adults and children, like peace camps, musical performances, marches, theatre, film, and soap operas. Some projects are well known, like Seeds of Peace and School for Peace, while others are less well known but need to be widely known. Successes as well as pitfalls and problems are explored. Despite dangers from the current political situation, and funding challenges, these programs have been shown to be sustainable and new ones are evolving all the time. These projects are inspiring and serve as a model for achieving peace between real people in spite of the odds.